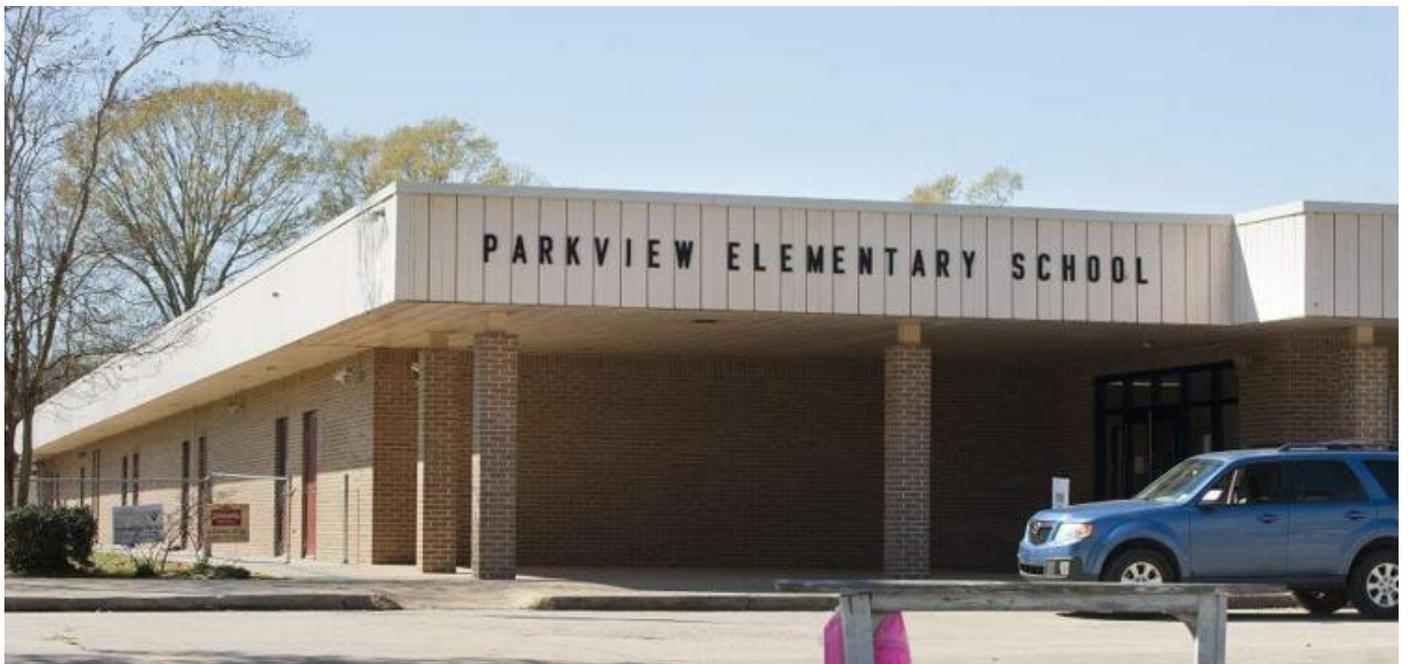

https://www.theadvocate.com/baton_rouge/news/education/article_ea7c7126-28c2-11ec-8016-67907072d0bd.html

Baton Rouge teacher lied about criminal conviction, had applied 25 times before, documents show

BY CHARLES LUSSIER | STAFF WRITER
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Parkview Elementary School is shown in this March 2014 Advocate file photo.

TRAVIS SPRADLING | TSPRADLING@THEADVOCATE.COM

Charles
Lussier

On his job application, a former Parkview Elementary teacher whose hiring has sparked controversy wrote “no” when asked if he’d ever

been convicted of a crime. Weeks after he'd started teaching, his mandatory background check finally came back: He'd lied.

In truth, he was convicted in August 2020 of multiple felonies, spending 10 months in prison, after he lied repeatedly about his mental health history in an attempt to obtain a gun. A year earlier he'd brandished a gun during a confrontation with a customer inside a WalMart, a criminal case that has yet to go to trial.

Before arriving at Parkview, Robert Earl Tucker Jr. had tried for years to become an employee of the East Baton Rouge Parish school system, according to records obtained by the Advocate through a public records request. In all, he'd applied 25 times before.

Most were for jobs in his area of training — middle and high school math — but he also applied for other vacant positions, including four Central Office administrator positions.

He succeeded only once. In 2017, he was hired to teach math to seventh and eighth graders at the since-closed Greenville Superintendent's Academy, an alternative school. He claimed that

he worked there for 11 months, but monthly personnel reports from that time show he worked there only two months.



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Almost all of his applications were submitted between 2014 and 2016. But this past summer, after a long break, he applied four times for jobs in the school system, including teaching vacancies at Istrouma High and the Juvenile Detention Center, as well as a dean of students opening at Dufrocq Elementary School.

On Aug. 22, he completed the application that would send him to Parkview Elementary. Five days later he was provisionally approved for a job at Parkview and on Sept. 8 he was cleared to start work.

“Congratulations on your new position and once again, welcome to the East Baton Rouge Parish School System ... One Team, One Mission!” wrote Amber Boyd, a staffing supervisor.

A brief tenure

His days, though, were numbered.

As part of the application process, on Aug. 31 he filled out a form and submitted his fingerprints to State Police. It would take State Police 21 days to complete their work, the documents say — the agency says it's normal turnaround time is five to seven days. Tucker describes himself on the form as a "White" male even though school payroll records refer to Tucker as a Black male.

The Advocate called Tucker seeking comment, but he responded by text message: "Advocate guy. Do not call me anymore. Thank you."

Suspicious arose soon after he started.

Children in his classes told their parents their new gifted math-and-science teacher talked to himself. Parkview parents were upset that he wasn't posting any grades.

In front of one class, according to parents, he accused a student of using the N-word, something other students say didn't happen. In another oddity, he insisted that students and

staff not pronounce his name as “RO-bert TUCK-er” but instead pronounce it in the French manner, as “ro-BEAR two-CARE.”

Then a news story began circulating about the August 2020 felony conviction. At first skeptical, parents became increasingly convinced that the Robert Earl Tucker Jr. in that story was now teaching their children.

What sealed it for many parents was when their children looked at the mugshot of Tucker that appeared in that story and said it was their teacher.



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Tucker stopped coming to class around the time his background check came back, replaced by a substitute — he told students he was away on jury duty. Finally on Sept. 29, eight days after his background check came back, Tucker signed a “notice of resignation.” He left blank the field asking for “reason for resignation.”

After the school revealed that Tucker had resigned, an uproar ensued. Several parents demanded and got extra security stationed at the school, lest Tucker decide to return to the 5660 Parkforest Drive campus.

At an Oct. 5 private meeting, according to three Parkview parents in attendance, school leaders apologized for hiring a teacher without first waiting for the results of his background check. But they would not answer direct questions about whether Tucker the teacher and Tucker the felon are one and the same.

Despite those non-answers, parents came away from the meeting certain that the man who taught their children is the same as the man in the news.

New revelations

In responding to The Advocate's public records request, the school district redacted much of Tucker's personal information, such as his phone number, email and home address.

They've also withheld the contents of Tucker's criminal background check, so it's unclear the criminal activity for which he was convicted.

But the documents provide more evidence Tucker the teacher is the same as Tucker the felon.

It was already known that Tucker the teacher and Tucker the felon are both U.S. Army veterans, and they both have backgrounds in teaching. Thanks to the new documents, it's clear they both grew up in Bastrop, La. Their respective handwriting is similar — both write in block letters — as are their signatures.

Other details of their respective lives also line up.

For instance, while school officials have not released Tucker the teacher's age, his résumé shows that he is a 1992 graduate of Bastrop High School. That suggests he's about the same age as Tucker the felon, who is 46.

Tucker the teacher's time at Parkview has similarities to a story in the court records of Tucker the felon. In that story, Tucker the felon had a meltdown in front of a room full of teachers at a new job he'd landed teaching at a charter school in Baton Rouge.

It occurred in July 2019, a month before his confrontation at Walmart and a year before he was convicted in federal court. IDEA Public Schools held a three-day training session that July for teachers from its two Baton Rouge schools, including the newly hired Tucker, to help them prepare for the about-to-start 2019-20 school year.

IDEA employees later told authorities that Tucker seemed to be having a “mental breakdown,” alternating between loud outbursts and talking to himself, even yelling at his principal.

“The employees were so concerned, the school was placed on lockdown,” wrote Carroll Landry, a special agent with the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives, or ATF, in his criminal complaint.

Tucker resigned that same day, but days later he came back to the school. That prompted a July 19, 2019 call to the Sheriff’s Office; a deputy went to Tucker’s house to warn him not to return again.

Should the district have caught him sooner?

Soon after the latest controversy broke, Supt. Sito Narcisse announced that he's discontinued the longstanding, occasional practice of hiring employees before their background check is complete. Neither Narcisse nor his staff, though, have answered questions about how long the district has been hiring teachers with incomplete checks, except to say that the practice predated his arrival as superintendent in January.

On Thursday, the School Board, at Narcisse's insistence, recommended revising the district's policy manual. It makes several changes, including removing the language that allows for conditional hiring before a background check is complete. The board is expected to fully approve the changes at its Oct. 21 meeting.

None of the documents provided to The Advocate indicate what research, if any, the district's Human Resources staff did to try to verify Tucker's claims, to examine his time at Greenville Superintendent's Academy, or to find out why he was passed over the 24 other times he'd applied.

Tucker presents himself as a seasoned math teacher with five years of experience in the classroom. That experience, however, came at the start of his educational career. It started in 2005 when he was hired as a middle school teacher in Bastrop and ended in 2011 when he was a high school teacher in Monroe.

In between those two jobs, Tucker spent two years at West Feliciana Middle School in St. Francisville, his longest held teaching position. And while he was teaching in St. Francisville, Tucker started, though never finished, a Ph.D from Southern University in math and science education – he says in his résumé he has all but his dissertation completed.

In the decade since he left the job in Monroe, a much different picture emerges. The only teaching experience he mentions since 2011 are the two months in 2017 he spent at Greenville; the Greenville job is not on his résumé. And he does not mention any employment with IDEA in 2019.

There are other places where his job application contradicts his résumé.

In his résumé, he says he taught calculus and pre-calculus at the college level for one year, but then on the next page he says he taught those classes for two years. In his job application, he makes no mention of teaching college-level math.

As to his time at Wossman High in Monroe, his application says he taught there from August 2010 to November 2011. In his résumé, though, he writes that he was still working there in 2012.

And, in another part of the résumé said he stopped working there in spring 2011.

EMAIL CHARLES LUSSIER AT CLUSSIER@THEADVOCATE.COM AND FOLLOW HIM ON TWITTER, [@CHARLES_LUSSIER](https://twitter.com/CHARLES_LUSSIER).